

Description of Minnesota /

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DESCRIPTION OF MINNESOTA.* BY HON. H.H. SIBLEY.

* First printed in the *Washington Union*. This was the first authentic information concerning Minnesota, published outside of the Territory. W.]

Washington, Feb . 15, 1850.

Hon. Henry S. Foote, U. S. Senate :

Sir :—you did me the honor, a few days since, to request that I would furnish you some information relative to the climate, soil, and present condition of Minnesota Territory. In reply, I proceed to make the following statement of facts, which must necessarily be brief, but I trust will be, to some extent at least, satisfactory.

That part of Minnesota which lies east of the Mississippi River constituted a portion of Wisconsin Territory, before the admission into the Union of the State of that name, with curtailed boundaries. The St. Croix, and a line drawn from the main branch of that stream to the mouth of the St. Louis River, on Lake Superior, now divide Wisconsin from Minnesota. On the west of the Mississippi, the parallel of 42 deg. 30 min., is the line of division between the State of Iowa and Minnesota, west to the Missouri. All the country up the latter stream to its junction with the Whitewater, and along that river to the British possessions, thence eastwardly following the line of 49 deg. to its intersection of the extreme northwest boundary of Wisconsin, in Lake Superior, appertains to Minnesota Territory. The area embraced within these limits, contains between 140,000 and 150,000 square miles; equal in extent to New York, Virginia and Pennsylvania combined.

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This immense region is bountifully watered by the Mississippi, St. Peter's and Missouri Rivers, and the Red River of the North, and their numerous tributary streams, which traverse it in every part. There are also innumerable bodies of fresh water, which abound in fish of various kinds—the white fish especially, being found in great numbers in the more northern and larger lakes. The general character of Minnesota is that of high, rolling prairie; but the streams and lakes are bordered with heavy bodies of timber, which contain every species of wood known along the Mississippi below, except beech and sycamore. At a point about eighty miles above the Falls of St. Anthony, west of the Mississippi, commences a large and remarkable forest, which, extends to the south, nearly at a right angle across the Minnesota or St. Peter's River. This vast body of woodland is more than one hundred and twenty miles in length, and from fifteen to forty in breadth. Many beautiful lakes of limpid waters are found within its limits, which are the resort of innumerable wild fowl—including swan, geese, and ducks. The dense thickets along its borders afford places of concealment for the deer, which are killed in great numbers by the Indians. The numerous groves of hard maple, afford to the latter, at the proper season, the means of making sugar, while the large cotton-woods and butter-nuts, are converted into canoes by them for the transportation of themselves and their families along the water-courses and lakes. At the approach of winter, the bands of the Sioux, save those who rely exclusively upon the buffalo for subsistence, seek the deepest recesses of the forest, to hunt the bear, the deer, and smaller fur-bearing animals, among which may be enumerated the raccoon, the fisher and the martin. In this beautiful country, are to be found all the requisites to sustain a dense population. The soil is of great fertility, and unknown depth; covered as it is with the mould of a thousand 39 years. The Indian is here in his forest home, hitherto secure from the intrusion of the pale faces; but the advancing tide of civilization warns him that ere long he must yield up his title to this fair domain, and seek another and a strange dwelling place. It is a melancholy reflection, that the large and warlike tribes of Sioux and Chippewas, who now own full nine-tenths of the soil of Minnesota, must soon be subjected to the operation of the same causes that have swept their Eastern brethren from the earth, unless an entirely different line of policy is pursued by the Government

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towards them. If they were brought under the influence and restraint of our benign laws, and some hope extended to them, that education and a course of moral training would, at some period hereafter, entitle them to be placed upon an equality, socially and politically, with the whites, much good would be the result.

The soil of Minnesota is admirably adapted to the cultivation of all the cereal grains. Wheat, oats, and barley, are already raised in considerable quantities, and corn grows to great perfection. Wheat and barley afford a sure crop, even at the British Red River colony, which is in latitude 50.

What will be the result in the cultivation of fruit trees in our Territory, has never been tested; but there is no reason to doubt that the experiment will be successful, with all those species which are produced in the same parallel of latitude elsewhere. Minnesota is destined to be a great agricultural region, and her prairies are well calculated for the raising of stock. There is also such an extent of water power throughout its broad surface, that no reason can be conceived why manufactures should not flourish also. The reports of those scientific men who have explored the country, justify us in the belief that our Territory is rich in copper ores, and more particularly in galena or lead. Whether coal exists is a problem yet to be solved. If it shall be found in any considerable quantities, the discovery will be of more real advantage to Minnesota than mines of silver or gold.

On the upper portions of the Mississippi and St. Croix valleys, lies the great region of pine, that will continue to prove a source of wealth to the Territory and future State for a century to come. The manufacture of pine lumber already occupies a very large part of the industrial labor of the people. The quantity produced during the last year must have exceeded eight millions of feet, although the amount is but conjectural, as I have no reliable data upon which to base a calculation. Much of this is needed for home consumption, caused by the rapid increase of population, but the larger portion is rafted to St. Louis, where it meets with a ready sale. This branch of business is in the hands of hardy, enterprising, and respectable men, who, enduring every species of privation in their

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wild homes, are too often fated to encounter heavy losses from the uncontrollable floods that set at defiance, equally, the strength and skill of man.

The climate of Minnesota is not subject to sudden change, especially in winter. Although in some years, the snow falls to a considerable depth, as a general rule, we have far less than is the case either in New England or the northern part of the State of New York. The comparative absence of moisture in our country is attributable doubtless to the fact that no very large bodies of water are to be found, although, as I have before stated, small lakes abound. During the coldest weather in winter, the air is perfectly still; consequently the temperature is much more tolerable, and even pleasant, than could be supposed by those who reside in the same latitude on the stormy Atlantic coast.

The navigation of the Mississippi is not to be relied on after the first week in November; and steamboats arrive in 41 the spring about the 10th or 12th of April; so that the river may be considered as closed about five months in the year. I have known steamers to reach St. Paul as late as the 18th or 20th of November, and get back safely to Galena, and to return by the 1st of April; but this is not usually the case.

St. Paul is the present capital of the Territory. It is situated on the east bank of the Mississippi, about six miles below Fort Shelling, and eight miles by land from the Falls of St. Anthony. It is now a town of twelve or thirteen hundred inhabitants, and is rapidly augmenting in population. Stillwater is a thriving village, on Lake St. Croix, about eighteen miles west from St. Paul by land, and twenty-five from the Mississippi. It is second only to St. Paul in size, and is increasing steadily in wealth and population. There is also quite a village at the Falls of St. Anthony, which is one of the most lovely spots in the upper country, and also at Marine Mills, on the St. Croix river, Sank Rapids, on the Mississippi, seventy-five miles above the Falls, and at Mendota, at the mouth of the St. Peter's river. Point Douglas is at the junction between the Mississippi and St. Croix rivers. It is a charming place, and is destined to be the site of a town of commercial importance.

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Pembina, is the name of a settlement on our side of the line of the British possessions, and contains upwards of a thousand souls, principally persons of mixed Indian and White blood. These people are active and enterprising, hardy and intrepid, excellent horsemen, and well skilled in the use of fire-arms. They subsist by agriculture and the chase of the buffalo. They desire to be recognized as citizens of the United States, as do some thousands of their kindred, who now reside at Selkirk's colony, in the British Territory, but who are anxious to emancipate themselves from the iron rule of the Hudson Bay Company. These 42 people are only waiting some action on the part of the Government of the United States, to join their brethren at Pembina. They would form an invaluable defence to that exposed frontier in case of difficulties hereafter, either with the British government, (to which they are much disaffected,) or with the Indian tribes.

I would remark, in conclusion, that the people of our Territory are distinguished for intelligence and high-toned morality. For the twelve months or more, prior to the establishment by Congress of a government for Minnesota, although, in the anomalous position in which it was left by the admission of Wisconsin into the Union as a State, it was uncertain to what extent, if any, laws could be enforced, not a single crime of any magnitude was committed. The emigration to Minnesota is composed of men who go there with the well-founded assurance, that in a land where Nature has lavished her choicest gifts—where sickness has no dwelling place—where the dreaded cholera has not claimed a single victim—their toil will be amply rewarded, while their persons and property are fully protected by the broad shield of law. The sun shines not upon a fairer region, one more desirable as a home for the mechanic, the farmer, and the laborer, or where their industry will be more surely requited, than Minnesota Territory.

I have thus glanced, in a cursory and imperfect manner, at the state of things in our country. Much more might be written on the subject; but enough has been stated to enable you to form a general idea of a Territory which is destined to be admitted into the Union as a State in the course of a very few years, and to eclipse some of her proudest sisters.

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I am, dear sir, yours, very respectfully,

H. H. SIBLEY.